

THE BELLA COOLA INDIANS

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their houses. Dishes, benches, cooking-boxes, cradles, totem-poles, canoes, all were carved from this wood. The bark was woven into baskets, and when dyed formed the most common ceremonial decoration.

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Even within the forty miles of the river valley formerly occupied by the Bella Coola there are considerable variations in climate. At the mouth of the river the typical Pacific coast type is found, without great extremes of temperature and with much rain, especially in winter time. During winter, the moisture is precipitated as snow a few hundred feet above the valley, and the limit of the snow can be watched on the mountain slopes, rising or falling a few feet from day to day. Farther up the valley, the winters are colder and in many cases snow lies for weeks on the ground, and in the upper part of the Bella Coola area the winters are severe, although much more moderate than on the upper regions immediately to the east.

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What has been the history of the inhabitants of this land?

They believe that long, long ago, *Atquntām*, the supreme god, caused their first ancestors to be created in his house, *Nasmāt a*, in the land above, and sent them down to populate the Bella Coola valley. These first people came in groups of two or three, brothers and sisters, or occasionally man and wife, each group descending, in many cases in animal form, to a certain mountain and then making their home at its foot. They brought with them animals and fish, tools and houses, also the knowledge of ceremonial dances. In fact, they differed from the Bella Coola of the recent past only in having greater supernatural power. These first people increased with extraordinary rapidity, until each group grew into a village, bound together by a knowledge of their first ancestor. In course of time the occupants of certain villages combined, as some increased more rapidly than others, but on the whole each settlement maintained its character of being the descendants of one group of the first settlers of this world.

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This mythological belief is a fair picture of Bella Coola life as it was when the first white man visited the valley. Mac-